IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for transmission over packet networks, the method comprising:

detecting, at a first node, at least one next node;

creating a channel between the first node and the at least one next node;

receiving, at the first node, a first packet;

detecting a protocol of the first packet;

merging the first packet with a second packet of the same protocol as the first packet into a third packet having a protocol different from both the protocol of the first packet and the protocol of the second packet; and

transmitting the ~~merged first packet and second~~ third packet to the at least one next node via the channel.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the first packet contains circuit-based information.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the second packet contains circuit-based information.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

determining whether available bandwidth exceeds a predetermined threshold.

5. (Original) The method of claim 4, wherein the predetermined threshold is set to provide a minimum level of quality of service for voice communications.

6. (Original) The method of claim 4, further comprising:

rejecting a communication related to the first packet.

7. (Original) The method of claim 4, wherein the predetermined threshold is set to provide a minimum level of quality of service for data communications.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the first node is an existing media gateway.

9. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the first node is connected to a circuit-switched voice network.

10. (Currently Amended) An internet trunking protocol node comprising:

a channel interface for assigning a channel to a next node;

a port for transmitting and receiving a plurality of packets to and from the next node;

a processor for performing instructions in response to received packets; and

a memory, in communication with the processor, for storing a plurality of instructions, wherein the instructions comprise:

instructions, responsive to the receipt of a packet, for detecting a protocol of the packet;

instructions for merging a plurality of packets of the same protocol into a ~~merged~~ third packet having a protocol different from the protocol of the plurality of packets;

instructions for transmitting the third packet to the next node via the assigned channel;

instructions for splitting a packet comprised of a plurality of packets of the same protocol; and

instructions for routing packets according to an internet protocol.

11. (Original) The internet trunking protocol node of claim 10 wherein the port is connected to a packet communications voice network.

12. (Previously Presented) The internet trunking protocol node of claim 10 wherein the port is connected to a media gateway through the packet communications voice network.

13. (Original) The internet trunking protocol node of claim 10 wherein the port is connected to a common packet communications voice network.

14. (Original) The internet trunking protocol node of claim 10 wherein at least one of the plurality of packets contains circuit-based information.

15. (Currently Amended) A method for establishing voice communication over packet networks, the method comprising:

receiving an internet protocol packet at a node in communication with a plurality of nodes;

splitting the internet protocol packet into a plurality of internet trunking protocol (ITP) packets, wherein each ITP packet of the plurality of ITP packets contains circuit-based information;

for each of the plurality of ITP packets,

determining a next node to which the ITP packet is to be transmitted;

determining whether available bandwidth to the next node exceeds a predetermined threshold;

assigning a channel to the ITP packet; and

if there is a second ITP packet that is to be transmitted to the next node, merging the second ITP packet with the ITP packet into a third packet with a protocol different from both the protocol of the ITP packet and the protocol of the second ITP packet and transmitting the third packet to the next node via the assigned channel.